

HISTORY

of the

WINDSOR RED CROSS SCHOOL

An assignment

prepared by

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"What is the matter with you? Oh, we couldn't employ anyone suffering from that."

"How old did you say you were? You mustn't be any good or you would have a job."

Has your heart ever been touched by the sight of a handicapped child? Have you silently wondered what can or is being done to help such a child?⁽¹⁾ In the following pages I shall endeavor to bring to light the history of the Windsor Red Cross School, where the hopeless find hope and the seemingly impossible becomes possible. Creating a unique and effective programme of teaching, training and therapy, the Windsor Red Cross Branch has provided the facilities needed to successfully treat this special child under one roof.⁽²⁾

I offer a special thank-you to Miss Marjorie Box, teaching principal of the Red Cross School, for without her interest, help, time, and knowledge, this paper would not be as complete and comprehensive as it is.

In the spring of 1949, the late Mrs. Roy Stephenson, Cora Stephenson, appeared before the Windsor Public School Board to request education for the group of handicapped children she had assembled at 1 Ouellette Avenue, in the old Ferry Building. At that time, this was the Red Cross Centre which contained a therapy department--offering both physical and occupational therapy.

Mrs. Stephenson maintained that the parents of handicapped children were paying taxes for the education of other children and were entitled to have education for their handicapped sons and daughters.

The Board was evenly divided. One half said, "No, it is only wasting the tax-payers' money." The other half felt it should be given a try. The late A. R. Davidson who, at that time was chairman of the School Board, cast the tie-breaking vote.

1. News Bulletin, The Canadian Red Cross Society, March 1963

2. Ibid.

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When Mr. Davidson was inspector for the city of Windsor, he hired Miss Marjorie Box as a music supervisor. Later he helped Miss Box to accept a student clinician's position at Wayne State University, where she was working, in the evenings, toward her Master of Education Degree, with emphasis on speech correction. Mr. Davidson prevailed upon the Superintendent of Schools to give Miss Box a year's leave of absence, and he suggested that she be given the assignment of teacher for the new educational project.

Miss Box received a letter stating that in September, 1949 she was to begin working with these handicapped people.

In his letter, commissioning her to take on this work, Chief Inspector, Dr. T. C. White, admonished her "not to expect to do it all in a day."

Miss Box reflects upon the birth of the Red Cross School, and expresses "Those first four months were very hard." The children were from homes which supported the Windsor Public School Board, the Windsor Separate School Board and some Essex County Public and Separate School Boards. Her duties were solely concerned with the offspring of the Windsor Public School Supporters.

At that time, Dr. Carmen E. Stothers was head of Special Education, in the Department of Education. He sensed a problem.

Late in the fall of 1949, he reread through the Education Act. As no school board had been appointed for this school, he took upon himself the responsibility for seeing that one was appointed. The new board now could deal with the other boards. The county boards were quick to join the new project. It was not until eight years later, 1957, after a ruling was passed by the Department of Education, stating that no school board had to accept pupils from another School Board unless that board was willing to pay for their education, that the Windsor Separate School Board was forced to participate financially. Up until that time the late Sir Harry Gignac and Sir Richard Keeley personally assumed responsibility for meeting the obligations of the Windsor Separate Schools.

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I would be remiss if I did not mention that Mr. Davidson had a clause put into Miss Box's assignment. She was to be on loan from the Windsor Board of Education. If the time ever came that she was not able to function in this situation, she was to be taken back on the Windsor staff so that she might receive her maximum pension. Dr. Stothers was not sure if her enthusiasm would tide her over the many rough spots which would arise. They still are arising.

In May, 1950, the Red Cross School moved from 1 Ouellette Avenue, to its present location at 1226 Ouellette Avenue. At that time it consisted of a room, nine feet by fourteen feet. Education consisted of two fifteen-minute periods a day. Since that time, gradually, walls and doors have been removed, the garage has been taken over, and presently there are four classrooms and an activity room. The services and use of one bus have increased to the use of two buses, and presently three buses. Essex County School Boards, three years ago, decided to join Essex Sun Parlour School which services those children with visual disabilities, hearing disabilities, and the otherwise physically handicapped. Essex Sun Parlour School provides transportation to a depot, where they board another bus into Windsor.

School Boards are charged a fee per day per child for Education, and the various boards involved settle with Essex Sun Parlour for transportation to the depot for those children attending the Red Cross School.

The Red Cross School Programme is designed for children who can benefit from intensive physical medicine therapy and special teaching techniques.⁽³⁾

Admission policies have been developed over the years. At first, the school enrolled everyone at the age of three. The day they were three, they were eligible to be picked up by bus and attend the programme. There were two shifts--one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Age sixteen was the dismissal point.

3. News Bulletin, The Canadian Red Cross Society, March 1963

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Later on a group of parents took over the pre-schoolers and the admittance date for those at Red Cross School became the same as for regular schooling--five years of age by the thirty-first of December. Since at sixteen, some pupils had not reached their maximum, the maximum age limit was raised to eighteen years of age. Miss Box began thinking in terms of correspondence courses and finally the age limit was raised to twenty-one years of age.

One lad did get his grade nine through Correspondence. To write a page a little smaller than a page of foolscap, every other line, took him twenty-five minutes. He persevered and never complained about the hours of hard work. At first the markers thought he was a careless, indifferent boy. When they realized the effort he was putting into his work, they thought otherwise and began to encourage him.

The only requirement that is placed on the pupils is that they give their best. Everyone moves at his or her own pace. Books are closed in June and re-opened in September, exactly where they left off in June. There are no fixed dates for promotions and everyone goes into a new grade the day he or she finishes the work of the previous grade.

To build a firm foundation, nothing can be glossed over.

Operations come and when they do the books are closed to be re-opened at the same spot on recuperation. Today there are thirty pupils:

- 22 suffering from cerebral palsy
- 5 muscular dystrophies
- 1 spina bifida
- 2 hydrocephalics

In 1963, eighty per cent of the pupils were victims of cerebral palsy. Pupils range from Kindergarten to Grade Eight. Miss Box is very proud, and rightly so, that three of her pupils were enrolled in Shawnee Secondary School in September 1970. One lad previously was admitted to Monarch Vocational School, and successfully completed his first year there. He is graduating this school year of June '73.

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The school teaching staff has grown from one teacher, Miss Box, who was also Principal, and five therapists, to the point where it now includes several physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and four teachers. Speech assistance is acquired from the Remedial Speech Association of Essex County Incorporated.

The Assessment Team consists of:

- Chairman – Dr. George Stecko - Orthopaedic Surgeon
- Dr. Joseph Berkeley - Physical Medicine
- Dr. George Fraser - Pediatrician
- Dr. Eugene Varga - Pediatrician
- Dr. Jacob Daniel - Neurologist
- Dr. Robert Mason - Psychiatrist
- Miss M. Francis - Educationist
- Miss D. Doyle - Educationist
- Mrs. Jeannie Cox - Educationist
- Dr. Susan London - Psychologist

This team of consultants periodically reviews the findings of the staff members who work directly with the children and then it recommends procedure such as; use of corrective equipment, operations on deformities, special schooling techniques and vocational guidance.

There comes a time when the Assessment Team feels that a particular child has progressed far enough that he or she might try a regular classroom. Always the promise has been given that their place is waiting for them if they find the new situation too difficult. No child has ever returned. Those who have moved out into regular schools have done well. One is at the University of Windsor. Two are at St. Clair College. One works in the office of a large Department store. One worked in the office at the University of Windsor until her marriage two years ago. One is at Variety Village, a sheltered workshop for handicapped children, in Toronto. (minimum admission requirement Grade Seven). One is a school secretary and teaching-aide at

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the Red Cross School, after successfully meeting the requirements set down for the Junior Matriculation Certificate. Others are still pursuing their education in varying ways.

To offset the extremely sheltered lives led by most of the children attending the Red Cross School, they are exposed to life experiences.⁽⁴⁾ The school curriculum includes regular excursions to the museum, farms, bird clubs and nature study situations. Each child at the school takes part in its annual Christmas play to help build self-confidence so badly needed.⁽⁵⁾ Although many, of the children are unable to write because they do not have the use of all fingers, facilities include a typewriter equipped with a special hood and a continuous roll of paper. Children are taught to write, add, multiply, and divide using this typewriter.

The Occupational Therapy Department consists of modern well-equipped rooms. The Remedial Gymnast room contains stairs to walk up and down on; a suspension unit to coax life into unused limbs and a bicycle to strengthen weak muscles. Here children are fitted with braces and corrective equipment supplied by the Windsor Rotary Club.⁽⁶⁾ The physiotherapy room is equipped with whirlpool baths, heat treatment facilities and other therapy equipment. The Craft Therapy room contains weaving looms along with leather tooling and painting equipment all of which affords the handicapped child the all-important opportunity to express his creativity.

Miss Box is able to cite examples of children who came to this school severely handicapped and who advanced to the point where they were integrated into a regular school programme and in later life have become productive, useful, citizens. As in example of how one handicapped person is able to help others similarly affected, Mr. Roy Wardle, a totally blind person, was employed in 1963 as a" therapist at the Red Cross: School.

5. News Bulletin, The Canadian Red Cross Society, March 1963

6. Ibid

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In 1963, it was noted that more than seventy per cent of the children attending the school had speech problems. Speech therapy at the school consists of muscular exercises involving the children in exciting situations so they will be forced to speak. It is a long process, involving countless different methods, exercises and stimulations.⁽⁷⁾

Thus we see that the Red Cross School, in 1949,⁽⁸⁾ sprung from the requests of parents of handicapped children and was nurtured by the efforts of a handful of determined Red Cross volunteers. It was most difficult, at that time, to get the support needed for a totally integrated programme.

The year 1949 saw a major breakthrough when Red Cross borrowed Miss Marjorie Box from the Board of Education to setup and organize the Red Cross School.⁽⁹⁾ Sensitive to the problems of the handicapped child, this determined and ingenious woman has dedicated her time, understanding, knowledge, and ability to a most worthy operation. Through her help and organization it has grown from one small room, to a centre now consisting of four rooms, much equipment and a staff whose primary purpose is to assist these handicapped children to become useful, well-adjusted citizens.

The Rotary Club of Windsor, the Ontario Society for Crippled Children, the Cerebral Palsy Association, dedicated Scout Leaders and many interested friends, have made it possible for the Red Cross School to reach the point at which it is presently functioning.

To quote Miss Box, who in turn has quoted Dr. R. S. Kosking:

"If we lived up to 50% of what we know is right and stood up to 50% of what we know is wrong, we could change the world."

7. News Bulletin, The Canadian Red Cross Society, March 1963

8. Ibid

9. Ibid

